REVIEWS OF NEW FILMS

". . . poetically dramatic experimental films strike fire. They sweep and soar through the other-world of the Abstract, of the Unphotographable, of the *Idea* caught, miraculously, in mid-air and transmuted through Film into Mind.

"The Very Eye of Night," . . . surely one of the most beautiful, inspiring and rewarding of the current avant-garde films. . . . in the sheerest and loveliest photographic spaceless images—creates by almost indefinable suggestion the sense of a limitless star-studded universe, swirling and soaring, singing and dancing through eternity. Mr. Ito's accompanying lyric score . . . . of aural beauty; and Antony Tudor's superb choreographic collaboration helps, too! . . . extraordinary motion picture experience"

— JESSE ZUNSER, *Cue Magazine*

". . . . . striking and wonderfully imaginative creations . . . . . although . . . some actually have no formal dance patterns in them at all, they are wholly choreographic in concept, in form, in rhythm and in imagery.

"The Very Eye of Night" is . . . in a very real sense, the evocation of a dream. It could not happen on stage. It could only happen through the magic of the camera.

Teiji Ito has composed a stunning score for "The Very Eye of Night" and he has also created new music, ... for "Meshes of the Afternoon." This is a Deren masterpiece and Mr. Ito's score enhances its values at every point. "Meshes," though choreographic throughout, is not about dance or dancers. It is a fantasy flooded with nightmarish terror and flashes of poignant beauty.

Miss Deren's . . . use and adaptation of the elements of dance should be of vast interest not only to connoisseurs of the art of motion pictures but also . . . to those of us who feel that new horizons for choreographic exploration are desirable."

WALTER TERRY
N. Y. Herald-Tribune

". . . . . Maya Deren differs from most of the other experimentalists through her clarity of purpose, clarity of images, universality of symbols. . . . . the area is not so much her own personal subconscious as a universal subconscious.

The movements and tensions of her films seem to be predestined. The unfolding, growth and climax of "MESHES OF THE AFTERNOON," . . . a masterpiece of cinema, to which the young composer Teiji Ito now has added what probably is the most dramatic American film score, have something of the tragic predestination of Greek tragedy, "THE VERY EYE OF NIGHT," . . . . . has the same tragic predestination of the stars.

With all the depth of Maya Deren's content, we are caught first, not by the intellect of her films, but by the intensity of their visual rhythms, since she is an artist using cinema in its purest sense. The intricacy of the various levels of her thoughts, the under-structures are waiting there in the film's psyche, to catch us at the right moment in the right way and work slowly into us."

— Jonas Mekas (FILM CULTURE)
the village VOICE,

new films **new lectures**

ART OF THE *moving*-PICTURE

MAYA DEREN

MAYA DEREN FILMS
35 MORTON STREET
NEW YORK 14, N. Y.

A STUDY IN CH

AT LAND

Conceived and directed by
Maya Deren

Technical assistance:
Hella Heyman
Alexander Hammid

(1944)

The universe was once conceived almost as a vast preserve, landscaped for heroes, plotted to provide them with appropriate adventures. The rules were known and respected, the adversaries honorable, the oracles as articulate and as precise as the directives of a six-lane parkway. Errors of weakness or vanity led, with measured momentum, to the tragedy which resolved everything. Today the rules are ambiguous, the adversary is concealed in aliases, the oracles broadcast a babble of contradictions. Adventure is no longer reserved for heroes and challengers. The universe itself imposes its challenges upon the meek and the brave indiscriminately. One does not so much act upon such a universe as re-act to its volatile variety, struggling to preserve, in the midst of such relentless metamorphosis, a constancy of personal identity.

By
Maya Deren
and
Talley Beatty
(1945)

CHOREOGRAPHY FOR CAMERA

Pas De Deux —a duet between a dancer and the camera

CHOREOGRAPHIES FOR CAMERA

The space of the field, the ritual temple and the theater stage have been, historically, a place within which dancers moved, creating, in terms of their own capacities and human limitations, the physical patterns of emotions and ideas. But cinema provides a different order of space, is able to create a different kind of time, can even cause the human body to perform inhuman movement. These choreographies for camera are not dances recorded by the camera; they are dances choreographed for and performed by the camera and by human beings together.

MEDITATION ON VIOLENCE

By Maya Deren.

Performed by
Ch'ao Li Chi

With Music:
Chinese flute and
Haitian drums

(1948)

The camera can create dance, movement and action which transcends geography and takes place anywhere and everywhere; it can also, as in this film, be the meditiating mind turned inwards upon the *idea* of movement, and this idea, being an abstraction, takes place nowhere or, as it were, in the very center of space. There the inner eye meditates upon it at leisure, investigates its possibilities, considers first this aspect and angle, and that one, and once more reconsiders, as one might plumb and examine an image or an idea, turning it over and over in one's mind.

The subject of this meditation is the movements which have been in traditional training usage in two schools of Chinese boxing—the Wu-Tang and the Shao-Lin—for several centuries.

RITUAL IN TRANSFIGURED TIME

Conceived and directed by
Maya Deren

Photographed by
Hella Heyman.

Choreographic collaboration:
Frank Westbrook.

Principal performers:
Rita Christiani and
Frank Westbrook.

(1945-6)

A Ritual is an action distinguished from all others in that it seeks the realization of its purpose through the exercise of form. In this sense ritual is art; and, even historically, all art derives from ritual. In ritual, the form is the meaning. More specifically, the quality of movement is not a merely decorative factor; it is the meaning itself of the movement. In this sense, this film is a dance.

This quality of individual movement, and, above all, the choreography of the whole, is mainly conferred and created by filmic means—the varying camera speeds, the relating of gestures which were, in reality, unrelated, the repetition of patterns so complex as to be unique in actuality, and other means. In this sense, the film confers dance upon non-dancers, except for a passage in which the large pattern and the individual action coincide, briefly, in intention. Thus the elements of the whole derive their meaning from a pattern which they did not themselves consciously create; just as a ritual—which depersonalizes by the use of masks, voluminous garments, and homogeneous group movements—fuses all individual elements into a transcendant tribal power towards the achievement of some extraordinary grace.

Such efforts are reserved for the accomplishment of some critical metamorphisis, and, above all, for some inversion towards life; the passage from sterile winter into fertile spring; mortality into immortality; the child-son into the man-father; or, as in this film, the widow into the bride.

Being a film ritual, it is achieved not in spatial terms alone, but in terms of a Time created by the camera. Time here is not an emptiness to be measured by a spatial activity which may fill it. In this film it not only actually creates many of the actions and events, but constitutes the special integrity of the forms as a whole.

Meshes of the After-noon

by Maya Deren

and

Alexander Hammid

↓ new

MUSIC by TEIJI ITO

(1943 - 1959)

The mind begins with the matter at hand -- the incidental curve of a road or the accidental movement of a passing figure. As it perceives these it possesses them as images, as the stuff of which it composes its night and day dreams in the forms of its desires and despairs. But the mind is not completely master of these images; they are charged with the primal, indestructible energy of their origin - matter. And it may thus occur that, of an afternoon, these restive captives of memory -- refreshed by new contexts and released by the lax discipline of sleep --may triumphantly regain the province of actuality.

The intent of this first film, as of subsequent films, is to create a mythological experience. When it was made, however, there was no anticipation of a general audience and no experience of how the dominant cultural tendency towards personalized, psychological interpretation could impede the understanding of the film

Sixteen years later, in 1959, a means of off-setting such tendencies presented itself. TEIJI ITO wrote a score for the film in the traditional Japanese Bugaku form. (This is perhaps the first time that, reversing the usual practice, Oriental music has been used for an Occidental setting). This music, with its dramatic intensity and its archaic austerity (a surprisingly contemporary sound) is not only extraordinarily pertinent to the film but, in its impersonal, mythological character, underscores and illuminates that original intent of the film itself.

NEW FILM →→→→

THE VERY EYE OF NIGHT

1952 *A Choreography for Camera.* 1959

The laws of macro- and of micro-cosm are alike. Travel in the interior is as a voyage in outer space: we must in each case burst past the circumference of our surface — our here - space and our now - time —,and, cut loose from the anchorage of an absolute,fixed center, enter worlds where the relationship of parts is the sole gravity.

When the sun sets,the stars become apparent; when our eyes close out the light to sleep, there rises in the night eye the constellation by which sleep-walkers plot their incalculable accuracies. By day we move according to desire and decision ; by night Noctambulo advances without moving, led by the twins Gemini (as the eyes are twins or as the I of night is twin to that of day.) It is by the dark geometry of such nightly,celestial navigation that the day's erratic negotiations are corrected and reconciled into the total orbits of our lives.

The film is in the negative.The blackness of night erases all horizon and, released from the leveling pressure of this plane, the movements both of the dancers and of the camera become as four-dimensional and directional as those of birds in air or fish in water.

When the film was first conceived, the constellation was invented to represent the archetypal Self of every man: as in the beginning,the center is of two parts; and the satellites are the four cardinal potentials of direction — circling a center which they both contain and extend. After the film was finished, the search for appropriate titles and names revealed that the universe itself had already been pleased to invent such a configuration long ago. Uranus ('Father of Heaven') is the seventh major planet; Urania,his mythological female counter-part, is an epithet for Aphrodite; the names of the four satellites, as known in astronomy — Ariel, Umbriel, Oberon, Titania — have been adopted for the four cardinal points in this film; and man, creature half of day and half of night, half of heaven and half of the abyss, is both contained in and contains this totality — see Da Vinci's proportions of man.

The original score by TEIJI ITO , for flute, bass clarinet, clarinet, Balinese brass gamelon , Balinese marimba, and three Haitian drums, was ini - tially recorded layer-on-layer,with Mr. Ito performing on all the instruments except the flute and bass clarinet.

(This film was begun in 1952 and completed in 1956. It was then entered in several festivals, but was officially premiered,reviewed and released in 1959.)

→→→

the Very Eye of Night

BY

MAYA DEREN

CHOREOGRAPHIC COLLABORATION

Antony Tudor

MUSIC

Teiji Ito

Performed by students of the Metropolitan Opera Ballet School:

NOCTAMBULO- Philip Salem
URANIA-Rosemary Williams
URANUS- Richard Englund
GEMINI- Richard Sandifer & Don Fraisinger
ARIEL- Patricia Ferrier
TITANIA- Barbara Levin
OBERON- Bud Bready
UMBRIEL- Genaro Gomez

COMMENTS

These excerpts are reproduced not because they praise but because they each illuminate and objectively confirm the realization of some facet of the artist's intention.

"...Miss Deren's intuitive grasp of the formal principles of traditional art and understanding of the pertinence of those principles to the modern quest for a spiritually significant visionary language gives an importance to her work which far transcends that of a technical exploration of the potentialities of a new medium. She is expanding the art of the film by reintegrating traditional principles of visionary search and realization that have been largely lost to contemporary life..."

Joseph Campbell, author, **Hero With a Thousand Faces.**

"... The subject of Miss Deren's films is always relationship, the relationship of the camera to objects and the altering relationship of objects to each other, as the camera view defines them. The means of expression is motion, conferred by the ordering of space and time; another dimension is provided by 'imagry' - the metaphysics or story of the film, if you will - which assists the audience to a fresh way of seeing. The formality and order of these films is a means to visual and imaginative freedom; variation is a key to infinite extension. 'Ritual', 'Meshes', 'Meditation' -such terms in their visual equivalents suggest both the concentration and release of essentials. The camera is a metamorphic instrument when Miss Deren controls it, no merely passive eye; and her films imply a notion of the universe as old as Zen and as new as modern physics."

- GENE BARO, Poet, Bennington College

"...This cinema delivers us from the studios: it presents our eyes with physical facts which contain profound psychological meaning; it beats within our hearts or upon our hearts a time which alternates, continues, revolves, pounds, or flies away... One stands before spatial events and within the value of their time... One is in the reality of the cinematic fact, captured at that point where the lens cooperates as a prodigious discoverer. This renewal of the contact between cinema and an essential part of its means and ends opens up so much out of which intelligence, sensibility and inventiveness can create poems. Poetry, after all, is the feast which life offers those who know how to receive with their eyes and hearts, and understand..."

Le Corbusier

"... the images are chained to each other on the level of emotional, visual and logical implication... her universe emerges as a consistent, ordered, and, above all, a powerfully convincing reality..."

- GEORGE AMBERG, Univ. of Minnesota

"...the beginnings of a virtually new art of 'chorecinema' in which the dance and the camera collaborate on the creation of a single work of art..." John Martin, **New York Times**

"... no lavish settings, no elaborate costumes, no costly props, no expensive cast, no Technicolor ... To do everything with nothing requires an artist."

JOHN GARTH, **The Argonaut, San Francisco.**

"...the real spark of this American (avant-garde) movement... no one has seen one of her films without being stimulated by the freshness of its imagery and its sheer technical virtuosity... without sensing the fact that she had... reopened a field that had lain fallow for almost twenty years..."

Arthur Knight, **Saturday Review**

BACKGROUND

These films undoubtedly constitute the most important body of work in the field of contemporary experimental film, not only because of their inherent artistic value and their enthusiastic reception by the critics and public alike (rentals alone, apart from prints sold outright here and abroad, account for an estimated audience of over 80,000) but also because of their role in stimulating the development of the American avant-garde film movement altogether. Miss Deren, who is writer, director, camera-woman and sometimes an actress in her films, rented the Provincetown Theater in 1945 for the first public screening in New York of 16mm avant-garde films, an event whose exciting success stimulated the subsequent founding of Cinema 16 and inspired similar efforts throughout the country. A STUDY IN CHOREOGRAPHY FOR CAMERA (1945) has been particularly influential in creating an entire style of dance film. Miss Deren is also primarily responsible for the formation of the Creative Film Foundation, of which she is Secretary.

In 1947, Miss Deren received the first J.S.Guggenheim Fellowship ever awarded for 'creative work in the field of motion-pictures'. Her films have won numerous festival honors (Brussels, Edinburgh, Sweden , Sao Paolo, 1st International Prize Avant-garde, Cannes, etc.) and are widely shown in universities, museums, film societies in America and throughout the world, including Australia and South Africa.

MUSIC

The scores, by TEIJI ITO, for THE VERY EYE OF NIGHT and MESHES OF THE AFTERNOON (originally a silent film) have won high praise for their dramatic lyricism and originality.

WORK-IN-PROGRESS

A new film, which consists of a series of brief filmic statements somewhat similar, in form, to the Japanese poetic form called haiku, is being prepared for spring release. Miss Deren is also editing a documentary of Voudoun ceremonials which she filmed in Haiti and about which she wrote DIVINE HORSEMEN (Vanguard Press), generally acknowledged as the most comprehensive book on the subject.

WRITING & STILL-PHOTOGRAPHY

Author of AN ANAGRAM OF IDEAS ON ART, FORM AND FILM and of articles for numerous publications, including Daedalus, Popular Photography, Dance, Mademoiselle, Flair, etc. STILL PHOTOGRAPHS in U.S.Camera, Theater Arts, Art News Annual, Museum of Modern Art, etc.

LECTURE - SCREENINGS

Maya Deren is also known as an unusually articulate and lively speaker, whose lecture-screening on THE ART OF THE MOVING-PICTURE has made a stimulating and lasting impression on university, museum and film society audiences.

FOR FILM RENTAL & LECTURE INFORMATION & FEES, WRITE:

MAYA DEREN FILMS
35 MORTON STREET N. Y. 14, N. Y.

STATEMENT

METAPHYSICAL - POETIC - CHOREOGRAPHIC - EXPERIMENTAL

Labels and classifications serve their purpose only if they are accurate or refer to so familiar a form that the term, however inaccurate, has been given precise meaning by common consent and usage. The films described herein do not have this latter advantage. The heading above is therefore an effort at accuracy. The customary term 'avant-garde' puts too much emphasis upon the historical; 'experimental', 'choreographic' or 'poetic' ,alone, would mislead.

In calling these films METAPHYSICAL, I am referring to thematic content. It has required millenniums of torturous evolution for nature to produce the intricate miracle which is man's mind. It is this which distinguishes him from all other living creatures, for he not only reacts to matter but can meditate upon its meaning. This metaphysical action of the mind has as much reality and importance as the material and physical activities of his body. These films are concerned with meanings -- ideas and concepts -- not with matter.

In calling them POETIC, I am referring to the attitude towards these meanings. If philosophy is concerned with understanding the meaning of reality, then poetry - and art in general - is a celebration, a singing of values and meanings. I refer also to the structure of the films - a logic of ideas and qualities, rather than of causes and events.

In calling them CHOREOGRAPHIC, I refer to the design and stylization of movement which confers ritual dimension upon functional motion - just as simple speech is made into song when affirmation or intensification on a higher level is intended.

In calling them EXPERIMENTAL, I refer to the use of the medium itself. In these films, the camera is not an observant, recording eye in the customary fashion. The full dynamics and expressive potentials of the total medium are ardently dedicated to creating the most accurate metaphor for the meaning.

In setting out to communicate principles, rather than to relay particulars, and in creating a metaphor which is true to the idea rather than to the history or experience of any one or several individuals, I am addressing myself not to any particular group but to a special area and definite faculty in every or any man - to that part of him which creates myths, invents divinities and ponders, for no practical purpose whatsoever, on the nature of things.

This is an area in which few men spend much time and in which no man can spend all of his time. But it is this, which is the area of art, which makes us human and without which we are, at best, intelligent beasts.

The intent of these films, then, is to create a mythological, poetic experience.

Maya Deren

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